

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 EUR-12 AF-10 AID-05 CIAE-00
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XMB-02 OPIC-03 SP-02 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 SS-15
STR-04 CEA-01 L-03 H-01 PA-01 PRS-01 AGRE-00
DHA-05 ACDA-07 DODE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00
INRE-00 OES-07 ERDA-05 FEA-01 ERDE-00 NRC-05 /142 W
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FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5195

INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 GEORGETOWN 2026

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: GY, PINT

SUBJECT: BURNHAM'S AUGUST 20 SPEECH CONCLUDING THE PNC'S SECOND
BIENNIAL CONGRESS

REF: A. GEORGETOWN 1856, B. GEORGETOWN 1888; C. GEORGETOWN 1961;
D. GEORGETOWN 2013, E. GEORGETOWN 2024

SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER BURNHAM CONCLUDED THE SECOND
BIENNIAL CONGRESS OF THE RULING PEOPLE'S NATIONAL CONGRESS
(PNC) WITH A SPEECH THAT WAS A TIMES SERIOUS, HUMOROUS,
SARACSTIC, TRUCULENT--AND DEMAGOGIC THROUGHOUT. IT WAS
A POLITICIAN'S SPEECH DIRECTED AT OVERCOMING IMMEDIATE
POLITICAL PROBLEMS WHILE AT THE SAME TIME ANNOUNCING THE
RATHER MEAGER GUIDANCE AND/OR HOPE FOR THE FUTURE PROVIDED
BY THE DECISIONS OF THE CONGRESS. THE IMMEDIATE POLITICAL
CRISIS WAS THAT CAUSED BY OPPOSITION LEADER CHEDDI JAGAN'S
CALL IMMEDIATELY BEFORE THE CONGRESS FOR A NATIONAL FRONT
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GOVERNMENT (REF. A) AND THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THE SOVIET UNION
WAS BACKING JAGAN'S GAMBIT. BURNHAM WAS AWARE THAT
THE CONSEQUENCES OF REJECTING JAGAN'S DEMAND WOULD BE
AN INDUSTRY-WIDE SUGAR STRIKE UNLESS HE COULD PERSUADE
THE SOVIETS TO DISCOURAGE JAGAN. IN HIS SPEECH,
BURNHAM EMPHATICALLY REJECTED JAGAN'S CALL FOR A NATIONAL
FRONT AND SPENT MUCH TIME EXPLAINING AND DEFENDING

COOPERATIVE SOCIALISM AGAINST CRITICS FROM THE RIGHT AND THE LEFT, BUT ESPECIALLY THE LATTER. OBVIOUSLY REFERRING TO THE OPPOSITION, HE SAID THE "ENEMIES WITHIN" WERE SEEKING TO DESTROY BY VARIOUS METHODS INCLUDING SABOTAGE. MUCH OF THE SPEECH WAS A CALL FOR GREATER PRODUCTIVITY, DISCIPLINE AND DEDICATION BY GUYANESE. PRODUCE OR PERISH WAS HIS EXHORTATION. HE ANNOUNCED A NUMBER OF DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE CONGRESS INCLUDING A RISE IN THE MINIMUM WAGE, A PROMISE FOR MATERIAL INCENTIVES FOR WORKERS AND A WAR ON WASTE. HIS DEMAGOGUERY AND ARTISTRY OBVIOUSLY PLEASED THE LARGE CROWD GATHERED TO HEAR HIM SPEAK, BUT HE OFFERED NO VISION OR PLAN WHICH GUYANESE COULD SEE AS LIFTING THEM OUT OF PRESENT ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CRISES. THE SPEECH HAD NOTHING ON FOREIGN POLICY. THOSE GUYANESE, INCLUDING SOME TOP GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, WHO EXPECTED BURNHAM TO COMMENT AGAIN ON IMPROVED RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES, AND PUBLICLY SIGNAL AN OPENING FOR FOREIGN PRIVATE ENTERPRISE WERE DISAPPOINTED. HOWEVER, BURNHAM STRESSED THAT PRAGMATISM WAS NECESSARY TO REVIVE THE ECONOMY AND HIS DESCRIPTION OF COOPERATIVE SOCIALISM REMAINED FLEXIBLE. SUBSEQUENT EVENTS MAKE IT APPEAR THAT BURNHAM'S FAILURE TO CLEARLY SIGNAL A MOVEMENT TO THE RIGHT WAS CAUSED BY THE ATTACKS HE HAD BEEN GETTING FROM THE LEFT AND BY HIS DESIRE TO MAKE ANOTHER ATTEMPT TO PERSUADE THE SOVIET UNION TO STOP BACKING

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JAGAN. END SUMMARY.

1. PRIME MINISTER BURNHAM, ILL HEALTH NOTWITHSTANDING (REF. C), DELIVERED AN 80 MINUTE ADDRESS ON AUGUST 20 ANNOUNCING THE DECISIONS OF THE SECOND BIENNIAL CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE'S NATIONAL CONGRESS(PNCO). THE MESSAGE, BROADCAST LIVE TO THE NATION, WAS A CALL FOR SACRIFICE, WORK, AND COURAGE. LITTLE HOPE FOR IMMEDIATE IMPROVEMENT IN THE ECONOMY WAS OFFERED. THROUGHOUT THE SPEECH HE SPICED IT WITH DEMAGOGUERY REFLECTING HUMOR, SARCASM, AND TRUCULENCE WHICH APPEALED TO THE CROWD GATHERED AT THE NATIONAL STADIUM. HE ROUNDLY CASTIGATED MANY GUYANESE FOR WASTING RESOURCES, LAZINESS, AND INDISCIPLINE.

2. GIVEN THE ECONOMIC CRISIS IN GUYANA, HE SAID THAT COWARDLY SPIRITS MIGHT HAVE SUGGESTED POSTPONEMENT OF THE CONGRESS. A LESSOR PEOPLE WOULD BE UNNERVED BY THE SITUATION. BUT THE CONGRESS HAD BEEN A GOOD THING, IT HAD GIVEN THE PNC A CHANCE TO ASSESS ITS STRENGTH. BROAD CONSULTATIONS IN RECENT MONTHS WITH PARTY SUB-GROUPS AND SUPPORTERS HAD BROUGHT NEW IDEAS TO THE AGENDA, HE SAID.

3. BURNHAM, IN SEVERAL PASSAGES WHICH CAN ONLY BE CLASSES AS DEMAGOGUERY MADE VAGUE REFERENCES TO "ENEMIES" BUT SAID AT ONE POINT THAT HE BELIEVED AND ACCEPTED ASSURANCES--OVBVIOUSLY THOSE OF THE US--THAT "THEY" CAN LIVE WITH GUYANA. THE CUBAN AIRLINER CRASH WAS CITED AS PROOF OF PAST DESTABILIZATION ATTEMPTS. REFERRING TO THE PPP HE SAID: "BUT THE ENEMIES WITHIN ARE STILL SEEKING TO DESTROY, AND WHAT THEY CANNOT DESTROY BY ARMED CONFLICT THEY WILL DESTROY BY WILFUL SABOTAGE." ANOTHER FORAY INTO DEMAGOGUERY WAS: "THE CONGRESS HAPPENS AT A TIME WHEN OUR ENEMIES BELIEVE THEY HAVE US ON THE GROUND." LATER HE SAID "GOLIATH BELIEVES HE CAN SLAY DAVID, BUT I WOULD REMIND HIM THAT GUYANA HAS A VERY PECULIAR HABIT OF COMING OUT AS DAVID EVEN

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AGAINST THE MIGHTY GOLIATH." IN RETROSPECT HIS APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN A REFERENCE TO THE SOVIET UNION.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 GEORGETOWN 2026

4. SPEAKING OF DESTABILIZATION, HE SAID IT "WAS NOT

MERELY A PHYSICAL THING WHERE BORDERS ARE CROSSED, PLANES FLY, ARMIES MARCH. DESTABILIZATION COULD ALSO TAKE THE FORM OF INTERNAL RUMORS AND CONFUSION. DESTABILIZATION COULD TAKE THE FORM OF AN ATTACK ON THE ECONOMY. I WOULD NOT...SUGGEST THAT THERE HAS BEEN A PECULIAR AND SPECIFIC ATTEMPT TO DESTABILIZE THE ECONOMY OF GUYANA. WHAT I WOULD SAY IS THAT THE ECONOMY OF GUYANA IS BEING DESTABILIZED IN COMMON WITH THE ECONOMIES OF MANY DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD TODAY. BUT THERE IS A CERTAIN ADVANTAGE THAT GUYANA HAS THAT CERTAIN OTHER DEVELOPING COUNTRIES DO NOT POSSESS. THAT IS RESOURCES MATERIAL AND RESOURCES HUMAN. OUR ENEMIES CLAP THEIR HANDS IN GLESS AND, LIKE THE VULTURES THEY ARE, THEY LOOK FORWARD TO PLUCKING OUR CORPSES."

5. STEADILY RISING OIL PRICES MADE THE DEVELOPMENT OF
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HYDRO-POWER NECESSARY FOR GUYANA'S ECONOMIC SURVIVAL. WITHOUT HYDRO-POWER AND INCREASED PRODUCTION AND PRODUCTIVITY GUYANA'S ECONOMY IN THE 1980'S WOULD GO BACKWARD. THE SUBJECTS OF INCREASING PRODUCTION AND PRODUCTIVITY, AND ELIMINATING LOAFING AND WASTE WERE RECURRING THEMES OF THE SPEECH. HE IMPLIED THAT THE OPPOSITION HAD CAUSED FIRES AT FOUR GOVERNMENT RICE MILLS AND THE LARGEST STATE SAWMILL DURING THE PAST 10 MONTHS.

6. THROUGHOUT THE SPEECH BURNHAM SOUGHT TO IDENTIFY WITH THE COMMON MAN BY VARIOUS MEANS, INCLUDING JOKES, EMPHASIS ON HIS BOYHOOD PROVERTY, AND OCCASIONAL USE OF GUYANESE PIDGIN ENGLISH. DISCUSSING THE PLIGHT OF WORKERS WITH LOW WAGES AND THE UNEMPLOYED, HE SAID THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE GOVERNMENT UNDERSTOOD AND SYMPATHIZED WITH THEM AND WERE DOING ALL POSSIBLE TO HELP. BUT THE ECONOMIC SITUATION WOULD NOT PERMIT OVERALL WAGE INCREASES. HOWEVER, THE GOVERNMENT HAD WORKED OUT AN AGREEMENT WITH THE GUYANA TRADES UNION CONGRESS (TUC) TO INCREASE THE MINIMUM WAGE IN STAGES BEGINNING IMMEDIATELY (SEPTTEL PROVIDES DETAILS) AND THE TUC HAD PROMISED TO ENCOURAGE WORKERS TO INCREASE THEIR PRODUCTION. THESE AGREEMENTS WERE "ACTS OF FAITH" ON BOTH SIDES, HE SAID. IN CONCLUDING BURNHAM SAID HE WOULD NOT PROMISE THAT STREETS WOULD BE PAVED WITH GOLD, BUT THAT "COME HELL OR HIGH WATER EACH GUYANESE WOULD LIVE DECENTLY." AND THAT GUYANA WOULD BE A SOCIALIST COUNTRY IN HIS LIFETIME.

7. COMMENT: THE SPEECH WAS FULL OF ALLUSIONS,

IMPRECISE LANGUAGE, PHRASES DESIGNED TO APPEAL TO HIS
IMMEDIATE AUDIENCE, HUMOR, SARCASM, ANGER--IN SHORT
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DEMAGOGUERY. IT WAS AN EFFORT TO COPE WITH THE IMMEDIATE POLITICAL PROBLEMS CONFRONTING THE PNC--THE CHALLENGE FROM JAGAN AND THE LATTER'S LINK WITH THE SOVIETS--WHILE ANNOUNCING THE RATHER LIMITED AND UNDRAMATIC DECISIONS OF THE CONGRESS TO SOLVE THE ECONOMIC CRISIS. ALTHOUGH HIS IMMEDIATE AUDIENCE RESPONDED ENTHUSIASTICALLY TO HIS RHETORIC, THOSE GUYANESE INCLUDING MANY HIGH LEVEL OFFICIALS WHO HAD EXPECTED HIM TO PUBLICLY SIGNAL AN OPENING FOR FOREIGN PRIVATE CAPITAL WERE DISAPPOINTED. HE DID SAY THAT A "LACK OF TIME" PREVENTED HIM FROM ANNOUNCING ALL OF THE CONGRESS' DECISIONS. THE SPEECH CONTAINED NO REFERENCE TO FOREIGN POLICY. FONMIN WILLS, WHEN ASKED ABOUT THE SPEECH, GRIMANCED AND CRYPTICALLY SAID IT WAS BURNHAM THE WARD POLITICIAN RATHER THAN THE PRIME MINISTER WHO SPOKE. WILLS SAID BURNHAM REMAINED OBSESSED WITH THE THREAT OF CHEDDI JAGAN AND HAD STILL BEEN TRYING TO PERSUADE THE SOVIETS TO DROP THEIR SUPPORT OF JAGAN. THIS APPEARS TO BE BORNE OUT BY ANALYSIS OF THOSE PASSAGES OF BURNHAM'S SPEECH DESCRIBING AND DEFENDING COOPERATIVE SOCIALISM AS THE BEST WAY, GIVEN CONDITIONS IN GUYANA, TO ELIMINATE THE ALIENATION OF WORKERS. UNFORTUNATELY, THIS QUEST FOR LEGITMACY AS A SOCIALIST AND A REVOLUTIONARY DRIVES BURNHAM TO USE RHETORIC AND OCCASIONALLY TO ACTIONS WHICH CONTRADICT THE PRAGMATIC SIDE OF HIS PERSONALITY.
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Message Attributes

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